

Why trophy hunting helps conservation and local communities

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Does trophy hunting really benefit conservation and local communities? The answer is an unequivocal yes.

At the risk of boring the reader with facts and figures as opposed to emotion and innuendo, let me state the following empirically determined, scientific facts.

1. In the 1960s, the blue buck and quagga were already extinct and four other species, the Cape mountain zebra, black wildebeest, bontebok and white rhinoceros were following hot on their heels as there were fewer than 50 of each of these species left.
2. In a 1964 survey referred to in Professor Jane Carruthers' book, *Farming the Wild or Wilding the Farm*, there was fewer than 557,000 head of game left in the country.
3. When that same survey was repeated in 2005, the number had grown to 18.7 million and the four threatened species referred to above were off the endangered list. Why?
4. There were only three game ranches in the country in the 1970s, whereas today there are close to 10,000 covering some 21 million hectares of land, or more than seven times all the land covered by our national parks and provincial reserves put together — and it has not cost the government a single cent. Why?
5. In this regard, please bear in mind that land under game in private hands also provides extensive habitat for millions of other life forms — birds, reptiles, insects and other non-game animals, none of which is ever hunted.
6. The game ranchers provide employment for about 100,000 employees, according to the statistics of the Wildlife Ranching Association of South Africa, who are better trained and better paid than the employees of the domestic livestock farms the game ranches have replaced. This employment is provided mostly in the poor, rural parts of the country which need it most.
7. According to the Department of Environmental Affairs, overseas trophy hunters spend, on average, R134,800 a hunt on daily rates and trophy fees. This excludes amounts spent on internal airfares, car hire, hotels, meals, taxidermy, gratuities and ordinary tourism before and after the hunt, which probably doubles the amount spent on the hunts. According to Satour, this compares with the less than R18,000 each tourist spends who arrives in the country by air. Given that approximately 7,500 overseas hunters visit the country each year, you would need to replace them with more than 100,000 ordinary tourists. This is not taking into account the 300,000 local hunters who each spend some R34,000 a year, or more than R1-billion, on hunting — many of whom are also trophy hunters. Plus, they all spend their money in the predominantly poor, rural areas far off the beaten tourist track.

8. The quiet conservation revolution which has swept this country for more than 60 years has been funded by hunting. The movement began when hunting was banned in Kenya in the 1970s, followed shortly after by Tanzania and Uganda, although both the latter have long since overturned their bans.
9. During these bans, the demand for hunting did not diminish, it merely moved south, primarily to Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. Farmers were paid more to hunt game such as springbok and kudu than they could make from farming sheep and cattle and set land aside for the game.
10. Since the hunting ban in Kenya, on the other hand, their own scientists, in a paper published in 2017, admitted to having lost about 80% of their game since the hunting ban.
11. There is no real difference between meat and trophy hunting. It is merely a matter of emphasis. Most meat hunters usually like to shoot big, male animals as thereby they usually receive more meat for the same amount of money than would be the case if they were to shoot a small male or female animal, for example. Trophy hunters and their support staff eat the meat of the animals they kill, which are also usually big male animals.
12. Both sets of hunters will keep trophies as a memento of the hunt, although trophy hunters do so more regularly than meat hunters. In this regard, this obvious fact must be borne in mind: Most trophy hunters come from overseas and it is physically impossible to take the meat back with them.
13. Legal, ethical, sustainable, fair chase hunting is the basis on which the conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat has been built in Africa for decades. To try to do away with it because of a minuscule number of legal and ethical breaches/mistakes is not only short-sighted and stupid but would bring about the end of conservation as we know it and, ultimately, the demise of the wildlife and wildlife habitat we all hold so dear.